

State of the Art

Saturday February 20, 2016

Back to the old way of doing things

Someone, I forget who, was chastising people for using the adjective healthy instead of nutritious for certain foods. Kale is full of good vitamins so is nutritious. But it isn't healthy, that is, it won't by itself make you healthy. Everyone knows of people who in spite of their bad habits live long and prosper. And on the other hand, people who have "healthy lifestyles"—eating healthy foods, exercising—die young. The use of the word healthy in these contexts misleads us. Food is nutritious. What is essential is enough food and water to keep us alive, so that we don't starve to death.

One TV ad states that fixing up your old bathtub will change your bathroom and thus change your life. Is this possible? Certainly getting a bathroom when you previously had only an outhouse and a round metal bath tank would change your life. I read quite often that a certain activity will change my life. How can I change my life, I have wondered. Generally speaking your life gets changed for you—someone dies, you lose your job.

I mentioned the approval of the use of the singular "they." My daughter-in-law referred me to a Canadian government document which also approved of the use in legislative matters.

My son sent me this interesting thought: "an idea is a sort of a healthy virus, one that can exist outside the body and can occasionally be transmitted from person-to-person". The epidemiology of ideas. An idea like a rhizome: "a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals." It does seem like that, doesn't it—that ideas spread quickly.

I learned two new words about music. The East Coast Music Awards nominations were announced, and I saw there was a category for "Loud Recording of the Year." I asked on Facebook what "Loud" music is, and jazz guitarist Geordie Haley replied, "Rock, less Eagles, more Zeppelin". Then Brian Bartlett supplied the links to videos of the two groups. I listened closely but my inexperienced ear couldn't tell the difference.

Another word to describe music is "mesostic." Here is a bare-bones description of mesostic as I understand it. It's a narrow word in music applied primarily to John Cage. A mesostic is a poem where a vertical phrase or word intersects lines of horizontal text. In the middle of the lines of a poem are letters which when read down form a phrase. Similar to an acrostic. Cage used a computer program to generate a mesostic which then formed the first few words of a composition. I think the word must be able to be used for poetry as well.

I don't think that either of these words will prove to be very useful.

My friend Frank Borg sent me his new screenplay and a stage play. The screenplay is for animation. I had to concentrate while I was reading it to picture animation, not real people. For

the stage play, I had to slow down while reading it to fill in the details that would be present on the stage. Reading plays is a different experience from reading prose. Actors probably get used to reading plays to have a vision of the characters as well as the set.

I asked my actor daughter about this. She said that it was the director's job to flesh out the play with the aid of the set designer and lighting person. Directors must "serve the text." They must envision how the play will look. When the play is produced there are actors, make-up people as well as the members of the audience.

In the past writers of fiction or poetry were imagined as solitary in their cork lined rooms, like Marcel Proust. Manuscripts would be created and sent off to a printer, and that would be the end of it. But nowadays writers often are part of university creative writing workshops—graduate or undergraduate. Their work is dissected, words and structures examined by many eyes. Or else they are part of informal groups of writers—there are dozens in New Brunswick. The writers will read parts of their work out loud at various public venues.

The manuscript is then sent off to a publisher who ponders it, and if accepting it, gives it to an editor who makes more changes. A handsome, trendy cover is designed. The whole process is collaborative.

But even Proust, writing in his cork lined bedroom, never leaving the room, rarely even his bed, had the help of others, because he wrote about these others. His friends, acquaintances, and family, were models for the characters.

It's possible now to go back to the old way of doing things, for the solitary writer to have the manuscript printed, eschewing the workshops, the publisher and the editor.